

Testimony of Katherine Throckmorton, Esq.
Opposition to Raised Senate Bill 1148
Environment Committee Public Hearing
March 10, 2023

Co-Chairs Senator Lopes and Representative Gresko, Vice Chairs Senator Hochadel and Representative Palm, Ranking Senator Harding and Representative Callahan, Honorable Members of the Environment Committee

Raised SB 1148 provides for various “bear management” policies in a knee jerk reaction to increased sightings and reported incidents (mostly with garbage cans and bird feeders) and one frightening, but isolated, incident in Morris.

Hunting has been on the to-do list of some legislators since at least 2008 when bears were all but nonexistent in the state. Recent events have provided the Hail Mary determined hunters have been waiting for but let’s not be fooled. Events in Morris should not be taken lightly but based on facts and science there is no justification for an all-out assault on our bear population.

Connecticut will fail its residents by falling back on draconian responses or blindly mimicking other states as an excuse not to think outside of the ammo box and explore best practices and honor the science. Raised SB-1148 should be revised extensively, hunting dismissed and the programs of [HB-5160](#) instituted. Those programs include a statewide ban on feeding bears and a grant program for assistance in implementing viable nonlethal programs to reduce human bear interactions.

Below are comments to Sections of Raised SB-1148 for your consideration:

Sec. 1 Revisions to Section 26-47 Permits to Take Wildlife

- First and foremost, Commissioner Dykes of DEEP advised in her testimony last year on a similar bill that there is a legal impediment to DEEP issuing permits to hunt protected wildlife (i.e. bears and bobcats, etc.) under this program.
- DEEP has existing authority (CGS Sec. 26-3) to take wildlife that threatens or causes damage to agricultural crops or livestock.
- Newly drafted CGS Sec. 26-47(e) conflicts with existing Sec 26-47(a).
- Despite rationalizing this proposal as necessary to protect the livelihood of “farmers”, it encompasses everyone with a chicken or beehive in their backyard.
- Waffly subjective standards; “reasonable,” “excessive” “not likely to be” used throughout.
- No requirement for a permit “application”, which should be in writing and attested to.
- No criteria/procedure/policy for DEEP “investigations” (line 98).
- Lacks geographic limitations on where this hunting may occur.
- No criteria, investigation or ability to ensure that the animals hunted are the offending parties.
- Fails to hold the applicant (the individual claiming damage) responsible for permit compliance.

- No specified qualifications for “agent” to whom the permit may be assigned/issued.
- No subsequent reporting requirements/follow up.
- Potentially allowing shooter to keep the kill encourages hunting, especially of our protected species and those subject to poaching.

In summary, Sec. 1 of SB-1148 presents an egregious overreach in its stated purpose to protect true “farmers” and mandates little oversight even in that objective. Instead, the section expands hunting and backdoors the killing of protected species.

Sec. 2: Revisions to Section 26-80a Illegal Taking of Bear and Moose

- DEEP has repeatedly advised that its current estimated bear population is well below Connecticut’s biological carrying capacity.
- DEEP has failed for years to institute substantive nonlethal programs to deal with human and wildlife interactions.
- Studies show hunting does not solve human bear interactions. Bears in the woods, where hunting would logically take place, are minding their own business. Bears in our backyards, where shooting should never take place, are lured there with our promise of food. Media accounts of homeowners’ interactions with bears have shown birdfeeders swinging from trees in the background or bagged refuse sitting next to pool fencing. Even in DEEP’s report on the Morris incident (CFS No. 2200016398) the investigating officer notes that upon his arrival the bear “. . . could be seen actively eating what appeared to be a small amount of trash.”
- DEEP makes money by issuing hunting permits, clearly a conflict in decision making.

In summary, there is no need for bear hunting in Connecticut based on either population or human-bear interaction. This provision looks to be driven by decades old desires to trophy hunt an off-limits species.

Sec. 3 Revisions to Section 26-25a Regulation of Feeding Wildlife

- Including wildlife other than bears is overly broad.
- Identifying these targeted animals as “potentially dangerous” feeds a fear-based narrative. A term such as “designated wildlife” is less emotional.
- It should be made clear this section does not possibly include feral cats and dogs.
- Unless DEEP can point to a valid statutory impediment for doing so, excluding state land from the scope of this bill emasculates it – a housing development bordering state land remains at risk for encountering bears at the same time those homeowners are prohibited from feeding birds.
- Subsection (a)(4) is the most troublesome. Provisions (B) (C) (D) and (E) have no requirements, reasonable or otherwise, to mitigate the exempted attractant. This effectively creates a pipeline for permits to hunt bears and other wildlife

under CGS Sec. 26-47 (see above). Additionally, an exception for feeding by wildlife rehabbers is necessary.

- Subsection (b) has no teeth. An infraction is paltry and prevents nothing.

In summary, Sec. 3 is a start, but its terms are mostly window dressing. It needs major revision and tightening, a very doable task, to be in any way productive.

Respectfully,

Katherine Throckmorton, Esq.
Connecticut Resident